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Department of
Agriculture**

**Office of the
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Office of Operations

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TO: All USDA Headquarters Employees *P. Carey*

FROM: Priscilla B. Carey
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THROUGH: Lou Gallegos
Assistant Secretary for Administration *John Green*

SUBJECT: Update on USDA Headquarters Emergency Response Information

At this time of heightened world tensions and homeland security concerns, USDA remains committed to providing a safe, secure work place for its employees and visitors. Realizing that even the best security measures may not prevent us from being caught up in an emergency situation affecting Washington, D.C., we are working diligently to provide emergency response capabilities that can meet whatever challenges we face. I hope that the information we previously provided about emergency communications systems already in place at USDA (along with others soon to be completed) offered some degree of reassurance that we are working on many different ways to keep you quickly and effectively informed before, during, and after a crisis.

Departmental and agency staffs continue to refine their emergency plans and post them on agency and USDA web sites. In that regard, the Office of Operations recently appointed a Director of Emergency Programs to provide oversight of all our National Capital Region emergency response activities and to facilitate emergency program coordination within USDA and with external federal, state, and local emergency response partners. The new Director, Mr. James H. Redington, has established an e-mail account at: Preparedness@USDA.gov, where employees can write to ask questions about our emergency preparedness capabilities and/or provide suggestions. Over the past few months, we have issued periodic updates on safety and security topics. With Jim's help, we intend to increase the frequency of these updates and to add them as safety tips on the Employee Information section of the Departmental Administration web page at: www.usda.gov/da/usdaoperations.

As mentioned previously, our communications strategy centers on possessing a variety of tools to reach the broadest number of employees and to share current information. Next week will begin a new phase in the deployment of the Computer Emergency Notification System (CENS). Its first Headquarters-wide test is scheduled for approximately 1:30 p.m., on March 19. Reminders about the test will be sent out that morning. This will mark a major milestone in our ability to reach USDA employees at their desktops with information tailored to each specific emergency. A briefing on how this system works is available at: www.hqnet.usda.gov/da/CENS.pps. Although CENS will soon be operationally deployed, we expect to continue with testing every 2 weeks, until we get all

the kinks out of the system. (As we have started the deployment of CENS we have found that some desktops will not accept this new application. Technical staffs are working to address these kinds of issues.) Testing will be reduced to quarterly maintenance intervals after the initial testing is complete. Should there be an emergency in the future, CENS will be a primary information source for employees, along with a new public address system.

The final steps to fully deploy the public address system in the Headquarters Complex are accelerating, and we expect to start testing it shortly. As another aid for employees, "A Family Preparedness Guide" developed by the Government of the District of Columbia has been reproduced and is available through your Deputy Administrators for Management. An electronic version is available at the following web site:
www.usda.gov/da/usdaoperations/InformativeLinks.htm.

While some initiatives, such as the public address system and CENS are highly visible, there are many others that are just as important but not as readily seen. Last year we implemented emergency plan options for other than the rapid evacuation of employees. There are many scenarios where the option to shelter-in-place provides a higher degree of protection than attempting to send people out of the building or home. USDA emergency plans provide different shelter-in-place options that can be communicated to employees, based on specific situations. Shelter-in-place options include remaining in your assigned office, moving to an interior space within your office area, or relocating to different areas of the building. Currently, instructions on which option to use are communicated by officials in radio contact with the USDA Emergency Control Center. Starting next week, these instructions will be shared via CENS and soon by public address system.

Designated shelter areas are not publicized in advance to employees, since some areas may provide better protection in one situation than in another. Our engineering and emergency response staffs have drilled and are prepared to quickly evaluate different threat scenarios so that the safest courses of action are pursued. Mechanisms are in place to evaluate a variety of threats and environmental conditions and to match sheltering requirements with building structural capabilities. While we realize that persons cannot be prevented from leaving any facility if they are determined to do so, we can assure you that a great deal of time, energy, and thought is spent on ensuring that an excellent response process is in place for your safety. Should an emergency event occur, we ask you to please follow the instructions that are provided.

With the introduction of a shelter-in-place concept, there are some things that you can do to help make the experience more tolerable. You may want to consider bringing and keeping a small supply of non-perishable food and bottled water to work. Most shelter-in-place scenarios will be of short duration, depending on the situation. We anticipate that water will continue to be available throughout our facilities, but we have also purchased an emergency supply of bottled water for the Headquarters Complex. Our

cafeterias also have basic supplies for meals for a limited time, again depending on circumstances. Other items you may want to consider keeping with you are extra medications and prescription glasses. If you are asked to leave your office during any emergency, carry your coats and purses with you. Our staff is working to be prepared to handle many special needs but does rely on the good common sense of employees to provide as much as possible for their own care.

While we have accomplished a great deal, we recognize that there is a great deal more to do. We will conduct additional drills and exercises and ask for your understanding despite your experiencing some temporary inconvenience. The lessons we learn and training benefits for our emergency response teams and each employee will be worth the effort. Safety and security updates will address other initiatives and emergency response capabilities for the Headquarters Complex, the George Washington Carver Center, and our people in leased facilities throughout the National Capital Region. It is important that you share in our vision for your safety and understand the scope of activities planned and underway. For instance, in an effort to provide timely and accurate information, we are in the process installing T-1 lines to each leased building and installing televisions in common areas so we can bring you emergency information via USDA's channel 6.

We intend to continue this series of updates on safety and security measures, believing that the better you are informed, the more you can be a part of whatever solution the situation requires. Please do not hesitate to voice any concerns and make any suggestions to our Preparedness@USDA.gov e-mail site or through your agency management. Please help us in this endeavor to make USDA the safest place to work in town. We welcome your ideas.